AGENCY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

John Lawless, Davidson College
jolawless@davidson.edu

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Much philosophical engagement with freedom or liberty[1] consists in the organization of concepts like constraint, interference, vulnerability, or dependence around an architectonic concern for individual agency. Agents are not merely beings to which things happen. Agents *do*, catalyzing changes in the world around them. In moral contexts, agents choose the projects they will undertake, and organize their activities around these projects. And agency is not merely a psychological or metaphysical capacity for choice and action. It is an ideal to which we aspire. We want to be the authors of our own stories, to be able to look on our works and say: "this bears my signature, this is *me*" (Pettit 2001, 6). It is by reference to this general moral concern that many liberal and republican political philosophers have constructed their conceptions of freedom as a social and political ideal.

This means that the ways in which we understand freedom will depend fundamentally on the way in which we think about agency. Prominent philosophical accounts of freedom rely on a conception of agency as a generic capacity for choice – that is, as a capacity to decide which possibilities will become actual. Call this the voluntarist conception of agency. By reference to this

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[1] Some find it useful to draw artificial distinctions between "freedom" and "liberty," but I use the terms here more or less interchangeably. I prefer the term "freedom" largely for stylistic (and perhaps idiosyncratic) reasons. To my ear, "liberty" sounds oddly antiquated, and seems at least to connote distinctively liberal concerns. "Freedom," on the other hand, seems to allow greater flexibility, and so allows us to draw the sorts of conceptual connections I aim to unearth in this paper. Nevertheless, the term "liberty" has in some ways served as the common currency of philosophical engagement with the kinds of ideals that interest me, so I do not abandon it entirely.

conception, these accounts of freedom represent diverse species of "unfreedom" as phenomena that compromise our capacities for choice: for instance, as interference in our choices, or as dependence on others' choices. We find this general approach at work in a wide range of theories of freedom, cutting across some of the most significant fault lines in contemporary political philosophy.

But I argue that these accounts of freedom get agency very wrong. As social beings, our agency emerges from our relationships with the other members of our communities – relationships which necessarily limit our options and render us subject to others' choices. The attendant limitations and vulnerabilities do not threaten our agency, but give it determinate form. By way of illustration, consider the capacities for choice that one enjoys within a game of chess. You cannot advance your pawn, capture your opponent's knight, or put your opponent in check unless your opponent has powers and prerogatives to move her own pieces, to capture your pieces, or to put your king in check. This affords her abundant opportunities to interfere in your activities, and so makes you subject to her choices within the context of the game. But that does not threaten your capacity for choice within this context. On the contrary, it is essential to your capacity to make the kinds of choices available to players of chess. Eliminate your vulnerability to your opponent's interference, and you eliminate the game itself.[2]

I argue that the point generalizes: Human agency, like the standing to play chess, depends on one's subjection to others' choices, and so on one's vulnerability to others' interference. Absent these subjections and vulnerabilities, we would cease to count as agents in any sense relevant to our political concerns. As a result, we should not construe agency as a generic capacity for choice, which contrasts with subjection and vulnerability.[3] Rather, we should locate our agency in our social standings, which emerge from the structures of our interpersonal relations. An apt conception of freedom as a social

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[2] I should emphasize that my point is not that one cannot play chess without being subject to the rules of the game. This is true, and many have used the point to advance the more general claim that agency in general involves subjection to norms. I am sympathetic to this thesis, but I neither defend nor rely on it in my critique of the voluntarist conception of agency. Rather, my point is that within a game of chess, our opponent enjoys powers, prerogatives, and opportunities to interfere in our pursuit of various permissible goals, and that this informs the kinds of choices available to us within this context. Launching any particular strategy requires *both* subjection to the rules of chess, and vulnerability to interference from one's opponent, but I focus only on the latter requirement.

[3] Or at least, we should not cast agency, so construed, an object of political concern.

and political ideal should target the structures of these relationships, and the ways in which they construct us as particular kinds of social agents: as players of chess, owners of property, members of families, and participants in various market relations.

The paper has four parts. In Section 1, I characterize the accounts of freedom I aim to critique, including conceptions of freedom as negative liberty.[4] I critique these conceptions of freedom, and the conception of agency on which they rely, in Section 2. In Section 3, I draw on this critique to sketch an alternative approach to freedom, one that focuses explicitly on the structures of our interpersonal relations, and the ways in which these relations construct us as particular kinds of social agents. In Section 4, I argue that this approach affords us crucial resources with which to recognize conceptual connections between diverse species of unfreedom – connections that conceptions of freedom as negative liberty tend to obscure. I conclude in Section 5.

1. The Voluntarist Paradigm

The general approach that I critique in this paper has been so widely adopted that it has become something of a paradigm. That is, the assumptions that underlie this approach manifest not only in the self-conscious commitments of particular theories, but in the discourse within which these theories arise. Call the approach "the voluntarist paradigm." In this section, I characterize the paradigm's structure, before arguing that two of the most apparently distinct conceptions of freedom in the contemporary literature – freedom as non-interference and freedom as non-domination – share the paradigm's fundamental commitments.

1.1 The structure of the paradigm. First things first: What is a generic capacity for choice? The capacity at issue is *generic* in that it does not depend on the content of one's options. It is not a capacity to make any particular choice, but a capacity for choice, full stop. To be sure, we might well take a

[4] We need to take care with our terminology here. "Negative liberty" is a term of art that diverse theorists use in different ways in order to call our attention to a wide range of concerns. Some use "negative liberty" to name conceptions of freedom as non-interference; others, to name conceptions of freedom as non-limitation. As I will show in Section 1.2, "negative liberty" as I use the term includes both classical conceptions of freedom as non-interference, and contemporary neo-republican conceptions of freedom as non-domination. It does not include conceptions of freedom as generic ability.

legitimate interest in the options available to us. We might care about the breadth of our options, or about their quality.[5] But in casting the generic capacity for choice as an object of moral concern, liberals and republicans alike argue that we value, not merely particular options, but choice itself. They often argue that we value this capacity, for instance, because it is part of what distinguishes us from (as S.I. Benn puts it) "the *things* in the world which are simply the subjects of happenings, carried away by the tide of events" (Benn 1975, 117 (original emphasis)). By making choices, we make ourselves responsible for our own life histories, focusing an open future into a determinate present.

The conception of agency as a generic capacity for choice plays two kinds of roles within the voluntarist paradigm, at what I will call the paradigm's "constructive stage" and "negative stage." At the constructive stage, we interpret diverse species of unfreedom by representing them as threats to the generic capacity for choice. At the negative stage, we focus in particular on those phenomena traceable to other people's choices, or to their capacities for choice. The result is a conception of freedom as "negative liberty," which requires the absence of distinctively interpersonal threats to the generic capacity for choice.

In its constructive role, the voluntarist conception of agency generates informative interpretations of those conditions that seem, intuitively, to contrast with freedom. What kinds of conditions might these include? First, they may include a number of intrapersonal phenomena, including psychological disorders, like agoraphobia or addiction; vices, like weakness of will; or certain delusions, which corrupt our sense of the world around us. Second (and somewhat more controversially), they may include non-personal phenomena, including general limitations on our options. And third, they may include a number of distinctively interpersonal phenomena. Consider a mugging, for instance. When the gunslinger demands your purse, she forces your hand in a way that limits your responsibility for your actions. This is a distinctively interpersonal threat to the capacity for choice, because it does not consist in the mere limitation of your options, but in your

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[5] We might even name this concern "freedom." Were we to do so, we might end up with something like the "capabilities approach" that Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have developed and defended. This approach has echoes in Philippe van Parijs's concept of "real freedom," and in G. E. Cohen's conception of negative liberty as ability.

I have no objection to the idea that we ought to take an interest in the quality and range of options available to us. Nor do I have any objection to naming that concern "freedom." But we should not confuse this "options-side" concern with the "agency-side" concern on which I focus in the main text (see Pettit 2003).

transformation from a chooser into an instrument of another person's choices. In a crucial sense, you do not give the gunslinger your purse; she takes it. She co-opts you into projects that are not your own, and so alienates you from our own activities. The relationship between the slave and the slaveholder drives this dynamic to an extreme: In a significant sense, enslaved people do not set their own ends; slaveholders do. Slavery, as a persistent condition, transforms the enslaved into an extension of the slaveholder's agency. The characterization of slaves as animate property makes this transformation explicit.

At first glance, these various species of unfreedom might seem so diverse as to be incoherent. But one of the voluntarist paradigm's apparent advantages is that it affords us resources with which to construct a "comprehensive model" of both intrapersonal freedom of the will, and interpersonal freedom in society (Pettit 2001, 1). On this approach, we interpret conditions as diverse as addiction and slavery by reference to a univocal conception of agency as a generic capacity for choice.

In the intrapersonal domain, we characterize the capacity for choice as constituted by a complex bundle of more specific capacities, say, for perception, for theoretical and instrumental reasoning, and for reasoning about the relative values of one's options. The exercise of the capacity for choice – that is, deliberation – emerges from the proper exercise of these more specific capacities. Intrapersonal threats to freedom disrupt this exercise. In the face of such disruptions, one's behavior does not count as action in its most robust sense, because it emerge from psychological processes that only approximate deliberation. For instance, on Benn's interpretation, "Kleptomaniacs do not decide to steal… [I]ndeed, they may decide not to, but steal all the same. Reminding a compulsive handwasher that he washed his hands only moments ago will not stop him washing them again," (Benn 1975, 113). When we suffer these kinds of psychological pathologies, alternatives to theft or handwashing may remain available to us, but we can't bring ourselves to choose them – however attractive we may find them. We are, in Benn's phrase, "inner-impelled" (Benn 1975, 116).

In the interpersonal domain, we might develop interpretations of (for instance) coercion or subjugation that emphasize the intentional limitation of the options from which we might choose. The gunslinger denies you the option of continuing safely down the street in full possession of your valuables, forcing you to choose instead between surrendering your goods and risking serious injury or death. By the lights of the voluntarist paradigm, it is through this limitation of your options that the gunslinger imposes her will on you. Slavery seems to drive the phenomenon to an extreme, because

the slaveholder enjoys persistent and extensive powers to decide the options from which the slave will choose.

In unifying phenomena as diverse as addiction and enslavement, the comprehensive models that arise within the voluntarist paradigm promise extraordinary explanatory power. But those working within this paradigm also discriminate among various species of threat to our generic capacities for choice, arguing that interpersonal phenomena like coercion and slavery merit special attention.[6] As a result, they typically construct negative conceptions of freedom that specifically target, not the complete conditions in which we enjoy generic capacities for choice, but the absence of distinctively interpersonal threats to that capacity. To be free in this negative sense is not yet to enjoy free choice in any domain. Negative liberty does not require that we enjoy "self-mastery" *tout court*. It requires only that nobody else enjoy mastery over us (Larmore 2004, 97).

It is here that the conception of agency as a generic capacity for choice plays its second, negative role. In order to mark the difference between positive and negative liberty, we need to pick

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[6] What kinds of concerns justify the distinction of negative from positive liberty? First, many argue that interpersonal threats to our agency differ morally from similar non-interpersonal limitations on our capacities for choice. The relevant differences shows up in the distinctive range of attitudes with which we respond to other people's assaults on us. Isaiah Berlin, citing Rousseau, observes that "The nature of things does not madden us, only ill will does" (Berlin 1997, 195). This claim might be too strong, but we can at least say that "ill will" and "the nature of things" elicit different kinds of anger. While generic limitations on our activities might frustrate or exasperate us, we are apt to resent coercion and domination. These outrage us. Some regard this as evidence that interference is, on the whole, worse than comparable forms of non-personal limitation (see, for instance, Pettit 2012, 43–4).

Second, interpersonal threats to agency seem distinctively salient to the evaluation of the political domain. To be sure, we often care about autonomy or self-mastery in general, and so (for instance) undergo treatments to ameliorate our disorders, work to overcome our vices, and read widely in order to shed our delusions. But to a significant extent, it might seem appropriate that we locate these projects in the private sphere, as goals toward which we strive as individuals (Pettit 2012, 49). In fact, it often seems that the state oversteps its bounds when it interests itself in our self-mastery *tout court*. Like our virtues, our disorders, vices, and confusions are to some extent our own, and it may be inappropriate for the state to deploy its coercive apparatus to correct them. (It was on roughly these grounds that Berlin first criticized the use of positive freedom as a political ideal (Berlin 1997; Gaus 2005, 295).) On the other hand, other people's interference in our activities (and our vulnerability to their interference) strike many as appropriate objects of political concern. Some have gone so far as to argue that this concern partially constitutes the context of political theory (Steiner 1983, 74–75; Steiner 1994, 44; Kramer 2003, 367–68). For his part, Isaiah Berlin explicitly equates negative liberty with "political freedom" (Berlin 1997, 194).

out those threats to our agency that count as "distinctively interpersonal." For those working within the voluntarist paradigm, we show that some phenomenon counts as "distinctively interpersonal" in the relevant sense by locating the choice behind it. Unless there exists some agent to whose choices we can attribute a given phenomenon, we cannot count that phenomenon as a distinctively interpersonal threat to our agency.[7] This centers our attention (at least, at a first pass) on people's choices to interfere in one another's activities.[8] The gunslinger does not accidentally force the pedestrian to choose between surrendering his valuables and risking serious injury. She does so intentionally, in order to bring the pedestrian to choose the option that the gunslinger prefers.

This, then, is the standard structure of the voluntarist paradigm. We discover at the constructive stage that some phenomena (say, intentional interference in one's activities) compromise one's capacity for choice, and we learn at the negative stage which of these phenomena derive from other people's choices. We then construct conceptions of negative liberty that require the absence of these distinctively interpersonal threats to agency. In its classical form, negative liberty requires non-interference by others. Thus, for instance, Gerald Gaus defends "the fundamental liberal principle," requiring "that all interferences with action stand in need of justification" (Gaus 2005, 272), by appeal to our status as "self-directed agents" (Gaus 2005, 293). To be sure, not everyone who conceives of

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[7] A variety of controversies arise at the negative stage. Different accounts of negative liberty elaborate the distinction between the interpersonal and the intra- or non-personal in different ways. Though intentional interference almost always picks out the center of the target, different theories extend the boundaries of that target in different directions. Benn writes that paradigmatic cases of unfreedom involve one agents' explicit intention to interfere in another's choices (Benn 1975, 110). Some theorists (especially libertarians) stop there (Hayek 1960; Hayek 1982); others allow that, even in the absence of an explicit intention to interfere, someone's action (or omission) may yet make another unfree if we can reasonably charge them with negligence (see Miller 1983; Kristjánsson 1996). But those who take this latter, more inclusive line insist that we can charge particular people with negligence only when there were particular choices they (*prima facie*) should have made, and did not make. So even these "extended" standards rely on a conception of agents as choosers, and focus our attention on threats to agency derivative both of choices that others *have* made, and of choices that others had *prima facie* obligations to make.

[8] Pettit expresses the spirit of the approach fairly explicitly: "Were non-intentional forms of obstruction also to count as interference, that would be to lose the distinction between securing people against the natural effects of chance and incapacity and scarcity and securing them against the things that they may try to do to one another" (Pettit 2012, 52–53).

freedom as non-interference takes up the commitments of the voluntarist paradigm overtly,[9] but these commitments often lurk in the background. And the most sophisticated conceptions of freedom as non-interference – for instance, Benn's – explicitly derive a concern for non-interference from a concern for the generic capacity for choice (see especially Benn 1975).[10]

1.2 The prevalence of the paradigm. Of course, this is only a rough sketch of the voluntarist paradigm, and significant axes of disagreement arise within the paradigm's conceptual space. Some of these axes seem to constitute the boundaries between fundamentally different approaches to freedom, but attention to the voluntarist paradigm's core commitments can reveal the underlying assumptions that these approaches share.

Perhaps one of the most visible debates in the contemporary literature has concerned the relationship between freedom and interference. I have mentioned that negative liberty in its classical form requires non-interference, but a competing tradition casts negative liberty as *non-domination*, or non-subjection to another's will. We can locate domination, not only in particular kinds of interference,[11] but also in the structures of certain relationships – for instance, in the structure of the relationship between the slaveholder and the slave. The slaveholder dominates the slave, not (or at least, not only) because of the ways in which she treats him, but simply because she enjoys a capacity

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[9] One difficulty is that many who conceive of freedom as non-interference balk at the idea of relying on an architectonic moral concern in the elaboration of our concept of freedom. Instead, they rely on claims about ordinary language in order to determine what freedom *is* before asking why, and in what conditions, we might care about it. Ian Carter seems to take this kind of approach, and while he does at times associate freedom with a concern for agency, that concern plays little to no constructive role within his framework (Carter 1999).

I prefer an approach that takes "freedom" to name a moral concern, and so something essentially worth caring about, and the voluntarist paradigm fits within this general methodological framework.

[10] Strictly speaking, Benn does not cast interpersonal freedom as non-interference *simpliciter*. He recognizes that others might intentionally compromise our capacities for choice in other ways–in particular, by attacking directly our psychological capacities for choice, say, through hypnosis. On these grounds, he pairs his principle of non-interference with a principle requiring respect for people's "autarchy," or intrapersonal capacities for choice (Benn 1975, 121–22).

[11] Pettit argues that only certain species of interference constitute modes of domination. For instance, when Odysseus's sailors bind him to the mast, they deny him one option–namely, the option of hurling himself overboard. But they do so only because he rejects that option himself (Pettit 2001, 75). Since Odysseus controls their interference in his options, Pettit argues, each sailor acts "like a robot that is programmed to satisfy [his] instructions" (Pettit 2012, 57); in such conditions, their interference reflects his own choices, and so is no threat to his generic capacity for choice.

to interfere in his activities with impunity (Pettit 1997, 21). Even a lazy slaveholder, who fails to interfere in his slaves' activities, dominates the people he owns. And, on a conception of negative liberty as non-domination, this suffices to make the slaves unfree.

Although proponents of freedom as non-domination reject classical conceptions of negative liberty as non-interference, they typically defend their conceptions of freedom within the terms established by the voluntarist paradigm. For instance, Pettit has argued that, if one person *A* retains a capacity to interfere at her discretion in another person *B*'s activities, that alone transforms the set of options available to *B* from, say, {*P*, *Q*, *R*} to {*P* if *A* allows it, *Q* if *A* allows it, *R* if *A* allows it} (Pettit 2012, 61). In these conditions, what was once *B*'s choice becomes *A*'s choice. And, Pettit argues, this suffices to compromise *B*'s agency, even if *A* does not actively interfere in *B*'s activities.

Pettit's arguments on this score have been controversial, to say the least, and a number of people have argued that we can accommodate his insights without abandoning a conception of freedom as non-interference (see especially Kramer 2008). And yet to a significant extent, both parties to this debate work within a common framework. Pettit does not reject the standards by which Benn (among others) arrives at a conception of freedom as negative liberty. Rather, he argues that those standards yield a different conception of negative liberty than Benn supposed. As controversial and innovative as Pettit's arguments have been, he still speaks the language of the voluntarist paradigm.[12]

And it is this paradigm as a whole that I critique in the next three sections. I argue that the paradigm relies on an inapt model for human agency – or at least, on a conception of agency that is an inapt object of social and political concern. As a result, the accounts of freedom that the voluntarist paradigm generates do not neatly capture our social realities. Like a flat map of the globe, the paradigm's apparently intuitive presentation masks radical distortions of the world it represents. Different kinds of distortions arise at the constructive and at the negative stages. I focus on the constructive stage in the next section (Section 2), because the arguments that I advance there will suggest a natural alternative to the voluntarist conception of agency. And access to this alternative (which I elaborate in Section 3) will better enable us to see the problems that arise at the voluntarist paradigm's negative stage.

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[12] Dagger makes a similar point in (Dagger 2005).

2. Agency and Social Standing

The voluntarist paradigm is right to some degree: We are purposive beings, who choose the goals we will pursue and the ways in which we will pursue them. And to be sure, our capacities for choice are crucial to the ways in which we think about ourselves and others. But we are also social beings, who participate in various kinds of interpersonal relationships. We are members of families, participants in various kinds of markets, residents of neighborhoods, members of clubs, citizens of states. To be sure, as agents, we sometimes choose the relationships in which we participate, and the ways in which we will participate in them. But we should not represent relationships in general simply as particular projects we might choose to take up. These relationships do not merely construct the furniture around which we navigate as we exercise our capacities for choice. They constitute ineliminable aspects of agency itself. In this section, I argue that attention to the significance of human sociality illuminates significant shortcomings of the voluntarist paradigm as an approach to freedom.

2.1 Extant relational approaches to agency. Of course, political philosophers have long emphasized various connections between agency and sociality, and before I advance my argument, it will be useful to sketch some of the themes that emerge in order to situate our claims in relation to those that have come before.

Many associate traditional conceptions of agency with a rugged individualism requiring robust independence of – and even disinterest in – other people. Critics of such conceptions allege that agency, so construed, is a traditionally masculine ideal, and stands in tension with the (historically feminine) valorization of caring relations (see, for instance, Gilligan 1982). If we insist on valuing individual agency, but wish to shed masculinist biases, then we must construct conceptions of agency that render it compatible with various kinds of dependence on the people with whom we stand in caring relations. At the same time, some have argued that the ideal of independence of others is not simply masculinist, but unattainable. *Everyone* depends on others. The masculinist ideal seems to celebrate independence only because people tend to ignore the ways in which men *do* depend on others, even in a patriarchal community. As Eva Feder Kittay points out, we do not find dependence "only in the case of a young child who is dependent on a mothering person. A boss is dependent on his or her secretary. Urban populations are dependent on agricultural communities" (Kittay 1999, xii). As a result, it might seem naïve – or even disingenuous – to contrast agency with dependence on others. However, the voluntarist paradigm at the very least seems to regard dependence with suspicion.

Pettit, for instance, explicitly contrasts freedom with dependence. Is this cause for concern? Does the voluntarist paradigm have a masculinist bias, or does it ignore the ubiquity of human dependence?

Not necessarily. There are many kinds of relationships in which we might find ourselves, and many ways in which one person might depend on others. No proponent of the voluntarist paradigm need assume any tension between agency and dependence in *all* of its forms. On Pettit's view, for instance, freedom contrasts only with dependence on any *particular* person's good will. For instance, Pettit asks us to consider a patient incapable of raising his hand without the aid of a physical therapist (see Pettit 2012, 37). And he argues that dependence on aid does not necessarily compromise the patient's freedom to raise his hand. What matters is whether other people enjoy the power to decide whether aid will be forthcoming, should the patient desire it. If the market provides (or better yet, the law guarantees) access to affordable physical therapy, then no person will be in a position to decide whether the patient will enjoy the option of raising his hand. The patient will depend on others, but will not depend on any *particular* person's good will. Only dependence of the latter sort threatens freedom, on Pettit's view. By representing only dependence on a particular person's good will as a distinctively interpersonal threat to agency, Pettit affords us resources with which to draw a number of crucial distinctions. For instance, we ought not conflate children's inevitable dependence on caregivers with children's dependence on particular caregivers. A society concerned to promote freedom might well establish services that protect children from abusive or negligent parents and guardians, moving them into new homes with competent and caring guardians where necessary. Similarly, we ought not conflate, say, dependence on welfare with dependence on charity; only the latter makes us dependent on particular people's benevolence, and so exposes us to domination (see Pettit 2007, in which he advocates a basic income).[13]

[13] We can see reflections of Pettit's point in Jennifer Nedelsky's comparison of the single mother on social assistance and of tenured professors at public universities. Both, Nedelsky writes, are dependent on the state for their income. But (she writes) in the case of tenured professors, "vast creative resources have been expended to structure that basic dependence in a way that maximizes our autonomy… The institution of tenure insulates them from the inevitable hierarchies of power at the university and in the university's relation to the state… The problem then, is not the fact of dependence on the state… it is how that dependence… [is] structured" (Nedelsky 2011, 39).

Another aspect of the literature on agency and sociality explores the connections between sociality and the *intrapersonal* aspects of agency, that is, those psychological capacities the proper exercise of which constitutes deliberation. We might call the ideal here "intrapersonal autonomy."[14] We lack intrapersonal autonomy to some extent when we find ourselves in the grip of alien forces embedded within our own psychologies, including (for instance) beliefs or desires that are the products of addiction, neurosis, weakness of will, or delusion. Many feminist and communitarian philosophers argue that, while intrapersonal autonomy may be to some extent "in the head," a complete discussion of intrapersonal autonomy must pay attention to the complex relationship between our capacities for practical reason and our social contexts. These so-called 'relational' approaches to intrapersonal autonomy reveal that self-mastery is an achievement available only to those embedded in relationships with others.

First, as Linda Barclay argues, "Nobody makes radical choices from an empty starting point" (Barclay 2000, 64). One begins with a set of values, commitments, concerns, loves, fears. And the people with whom we interact play an enormous role in shaping our personalities, training us into particular ways of life and socializing us into particular modes of evaluation (see also Sandel 1988). The cultures in which we mature, and the characters of those closest to us, significantly inform the content of our own characters. While we may reject significant aspects of the surrounding culture, and may cast a critical eye on the values and commitments that our loved ones espouse, the people we become inevitably bear significant traces of our starting points.

Second, we depend on others for the development and exercise of the capacities essential to intrapersonal autonomy. These include capacities for critical reflection, for self-discovery, and for self-definition (Young 1986; Dworkin 1988; Meyers 1989).[15] On the one hand, such capacities do not appear *ex nihilo*. We are, in Annette Baier's phrase, always "second persons" (Baier 1985, 85). Someone always stands in the background, causally responsible for the cultivation of these capacities in us as

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[14] In the literature, some seem to use the phrase "personal autonomy" to pick out just the kind of thing I have in mind here. However, just as "negative liberty" is a term of art that diverse theorists attach to diverse phenomena, so too with "personal autonomy": Some seem to use the phrase to pick out what I have been calling "self-mastery," vulnerable to addiction and coercion alike. I use the phrase "intrapersonal autonomy" in the main text in order to avoid this slippage.

[15] Some have argued that intrapersonal autonomy also requires a capacity to recognize and respond to reason–a controversial view, but one to which I am sympathetic. See (Wolf 1990; Benson 1991; Stoljar 2000).

children (Barclay 2000, 57). On the other hand, we sometimes depend on others' aid in the exercise of our capacities for self-discovery and self-definition. For instance, Diana Meyers argues that self-discovery requires that one be able to "read" one's emotional responses to a range of real and hypothetical cases. And conversation with others can play an enormous role in this process. We often rely on others to provide stimulating hypothetical cases, and illuminating explanations for our responses to these cases (Meyers 1989, 79). Without conversation with others, then, we would struggle to know ourselves well, and so would struggle to achieve intrapersonal autonomy.

Third, many have argued that intrapersonal autonomy requires that we take certain attitudes toward ourselves, including self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem (Benson 2000; Mackenzie 2008; Westlund 2003; Anderson and Honneth 2005; see also Christman 2014). That is, intrapersonal autonomy requires that one take oneself to have the authority to make one's own choices, and that one take oneself to have capacities to make those choices well. And (the argument goes) we do not come by self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem in a social vacuum. Rather, we acquire these attitudes in the course of interactions with others who *treat* us as beings possessed of the relevant authorities and capacities. Deprived of these interactions, we may not learn to see ourselves as the authors of our own stories, and so might passively accept the circumstances in which we find ourselves and the decisions that others make for us.

These arguments reveal complex connections between sociality and intrapersonal autonomy, and they raise several apparent challenges to the voluntarist paradigm. I focus on three such challenges here.

First, we might worry that the fact of human socialization generates a problem for the representation of agency as a generic capacity for choice. After all, human socialization is an external influence on the choices we make. However, this only generates trouble for the voluntarist paradigm if we assume that *any* external influence on our deliberations threatens our capacity for choice. But few working within the paradigm would endorse this assumption. In particular, they often distinguish the kind of influence that, say, addiction has on one's deliberations, from the kind of influence that reasons might have. If our engagement with certain kinds of socialization is sufficiently like our engagement with reasons – if say, we can distinguish education and conversation from indoctrination – then the voluntarist paradigm is compatible with the fact of socialization. I will not defend this

antecedent here. My point is only that the fact of human socialization does not generate an obviously insuperable problem for the voluntarist paradigm.

Second, these arguments show that negative liberty is not sufficient for agency. Neither conditions of non-interference, nor conditions of non-domination, guarantee that one will enjoy the kinds of care that are necessary to the development of one's capacities for self-discovery and self-definition, the kinds of conversations necessary to the exercise of these capacities, or the kinds of interactions that encourage one's self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem. However, those who take up the voluntarist paradigm rarely claim that negative liberty suffices for agency. In fact, this is a feature of the voluntarist paradigm, as I characterized it in Section 1. They argue only that negative liberty targets necessary conditions for agency – necessary that are of distinctive political significance (see n. 6). So the problem of insufficiency is no problem at all.

Finally, relational approaches to intrapersonal autonomy radically expand the class of *interpersonal* threats to human agency. Many feminist philosophers have been particularly concerned to defend the idea that, while socialization into cultural forms is not *in itself* a threat to agency, socialization into oppressive norms – for instance, norms of masculinity and femininity – can threaten intrapersonal autonomy (see, for instance, Meyers 1989; Benson 1991; Benson 2000; Stoljar 2000; Mackenzie 2008; Westlund 2003). But oppressive socialization often is the result of social processes for which no identifiable agent is responsible. In many cases, no person chooses to educate children into harmful norms of masculinity or femininity. It is simply impossible to avoid such an education in a sexist society. However, while relational approaches to intrapersonal autonomy do enrich our catalogue of the diverse threats to agency, and while many of the new threats it identifies are in *some* sense interpersonal, that again is not yet a threat to the voluntarist paradigm. Proponents of the voluntarist paradigm do not target interference or domination simply because such threats are interpersonal in *some* sense. They argue that these phenomena are of distinctive significance because, as we saw in Section 1.1, they generate a maldistribution of agency. When one person interferes in or dominates another's activities, she co-opts responsibility for those activities, acting through him as though he were a mere instrument. The fact that oppressive socialization counts as an interpersonal threat to agency does not yet show that we have no need for a concept specifically targeting this maldistribution of agency, and negative liberty purports to be just such a concept. (To be sure, proponents of *particular versions* of the voluntarist paradigm have ignored the moral significance of oppressive socialization, and have downplayed the significance of human dependence. Relational approaches to intrapersonal

autonomy help us to see the problems with these versions. But we have yet to see any reason to abandon the paradigm itself.)

While this hardly constitutes an exhaustive survey of the literature exploring the various connections between agency and sociality, it should serve to demonstrate that the voluntarist paradigm is compatible with many of these connections. However, in the rest of this section I identify a further aspect of human sociality that poses a more significant threat to the paradigm. I argue that attention to the ways in which our relationships bear on the kinds of actions we can perform, and so on the kinds of choices we can make, illuminates significant shortcomings of the voluntarist paradigm as an approach to freedom.

2.2 Status relations. Many of the interpersonal relations in which we stand typically consist (at least in part) in various bundles of status relations: constellations of prerogatives, claims against others, powers over others, and immunities or liabilities to others' powers. Property ownership, for instance, does not consist in the bare control of material goods, but in variable bundles of prerogatives to use these goods as we please (within certain limits); of claims against others' use of these goods; and of powers to waive these claims temporarily, or to alienate them permanently through gift, sale, or bequest.

It might seem tempting to think of our status relations as resources with which we might constrain one another's interference in our activities, building fences that protect our generic capacities for choice from attack within particular domains. Many liberal and republican frameworks cast rights of ownership, for instance, as barriers enclosing spaces within which other people are unlikely to interfere in our activities, or unable to do so with impunity. But status relations differ from mere fences in two crucial ways.

First, our status relations necessarily afford us certain kinds of communicative resources, which mere fences do not. These resources enable us to influence one another's actions "indirectly," not by imposing physical limitations on their choices, but by reasoning with them. For instance, landowners can put up signs marking the boundaries of their property. Instead of (or in addition to) relying on physical walls that block people's entry, they can expect that others will comprehend the significance of these signs, recognizing that someone owns the land and has claims against trespass. And they can expect that, on the basis of this recognition, some people will refrain from trespassing. I do not mean to say that everyone will respect landowners' claims simply on recognizing them. But

ownership at least opens up the possibility. Mere fences do none of this. To recognize a physical barrier is not to recognize that someone has a claim against your occupation of space on the other side of the barrier, except in very specific social contexts that associate these physical barriers with status relations. The fence on its own does not afford us the kinds of resources that ownership affords for the rational regulation of our interactions with others.[16] Call this the *communicative* dimension of status relations.

Second, status relations do not simply limit others' interference in our activities. They are not simply boundaries drawn on pre-existing terrain. Rather, they construct the very landscape on which we interact by giving socially recognizable meaning to our words and actions. They establish actions that would not be possible – would not even be comprehensible – outside of the normatively defined social contexts they constitute. In the context of chess, for instance, players' various powers and prerogatives enable and allow them to move their own pieces, to capture one another's pieces, and to put their opponent's king in check. Outside of this social context, they could not make these moves at all. Perhaps they could rearrange small plastic objects on a square, checkered board, but this would be a far cry from playing chess (see Rawls 1955).[17]

And this is not peculiar to chess. In fact, status relations color every aspect of our actions and interactions. Consider, for instance, the act of telling someone that it is raining outside. When we convey a fact by testimony in the course of casual conversation, we do not simply produce evidence that our claim is true. Rather, we assure our interlocutors of its truth, and so make ourselves accountable for it (Moran 2005). These relations of accountability, and our powers to enter into them, constitute particular forms that our status relations might take. Without these status relations, we

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[16] Thus, we should not cast rights as walls between us and those who would harm us, as do some proponents of relational approaches to autonomy (Nedelsky 2011, 124). Rights are essentially relational.

[17] I do not mean to argue individuals lack the concepts necessary for particular choices and actions unless they enjoy the relevant status relations. Rather, my point is that *even if* someone has access to the relevant concepts, she cannot play chess until she enters into a particular game of chess, thereby taking up the relationships that the rules define. That is, the actions available to her do not depend only the concepts with which she is competent, but on the current structures of her relationships with others. In this respect, my point differs from Sandel's claim that the practices effective in our communities inevitably inform the concepts on which we rely in the course of practical deliberation (see, for instance, Sandel 1988; Sandel 1992).

might well bring someone to believe that it is raining outside, but we could not carry on anything like a conversation with them.

Consider, too, the bare act of walking down the street. As pedestrians navigate one another's paths on the sidewalk, they negotiate their routes not only in order to avoid collisions, but in order to respect one another's claims on personal space. The ways in which they do so reflect the distribution of such claims, as plebeians make way for patricians, and patricians forge ahead unperturbed. This colors what we might in certain moods cast as the purely physical act of traveling by foot from one point to another, making different kinds of actions available to people in different social locations. When a plebeian and a patrician collide, the distribution of status relations affects the content of their actions: Though both neglected the other's route, only one party commits a *faux pas*.

Or, finally, consider ownership again. Rights of ownership do not merely protect us from others' interference in our use of the goods we own. Most obviously, they also enable us to sell, lend, gift, or bequeath these goods to others. And even when we simply use these goods, our rights of ownership color our actions by constructing these goods as *ours*, and so distinguishing our actions from other, physically similar actions. It is in virtue of our rights of ownership that, when we take off on our morning commutes, we exercise our prerogatives to use our cars – and do not, say, steal someone else's car, or borrow a friend's car. The differences among these actions make sense only against the normatively rich backdrop of private ownership. We would perform very different actions in different normative contexts – say, contexts in which the state owns all cars, but licenses private citizens to use them under certain circumstances; or in which all citizens rent cars from private companies for relatively short periods of time; or in which nobody owns anything at all. You might drive *a* car in these alternative contexts, but you can drive *your* car only in the context of private ownership.[18]

[18] It is worth emphasizing that rights of private ownership do not construct the things we own as *ours* simply by guaranteeing to us access to these goods. That is because of ownership's communicative dimension. We cannot own something unless we have at least some resources with which to communicate with others about our claims on them. When someone absentmindedly picks up your mobile phone and begins to walk away, you can say to them: "That one is mine. This one is yours." And they will know what you mean. Guaranteed access to some material good does not on its own afford us these communicative resources. See n. 16.

I have not labored over these points because they are particularly controversial. They aren't. Those working within the voluntarist paradigm will find none of what I have said so far surprising. But careful attention to these points illuminates the ways in which this paradigm limits and distorts our moral vocabulary.

2.3 The critique of the voluntarist paradigm. In order to get at the distortion, let's introduce two new concepts. First, what I will call *essentially social actions* derive their content in part from the status relations in which the actor participates. The actions surveyed above – like driving one's own car to work, lending a book to a friend, or claiming personal space as one meanders down the street – all are essentially social actions. Second, to enjoy the standing to perform an essentially social action is to enjoy those status relations necessary to the performance of that action. One enjoys the standing to drive one's car to work only if one owns a car (and has not rented it out, is not under house arrest, and so on).[19]

I should emphasize that I mean only to argue that *specific* actions derive their content in part from the structures of the actor's status relations with other people. We should not confuse this with the much bolder thesis that action *as such* is essentially social in some sense (see, for instance, Brandom 1994; Rousse 2013). This bolder thesis is much more controversial than the weaker thesis on which I rely, which holds only that many specific actions are essentially social. Though I am sympathetic to the bolder thesis, I rely on the weaker thesis in the rest of this section in part in order to appeal to those who do not share these sympathies. Moreover, those who argue for the bolder thesis typically frame the thesis as a claim about the nature of normativity, intentionality, or semantic content. If we can derive any lessons about the ways in which we should conceive of freedom as a political ideal from these discussions, it is hardly clear what those lessons might be. They might incline us toward the conclusions I advance here, but that is not the kind of argument I aim to advance in this paper.

Nonetheless, for social beings like us, a concern for agency must involve some kind of concern for the standing to perform such essentially social actions. A being without standing at all could not play chess, own a car, or get married. It could not vote, make a promise, claim a place in a line, or hire

[19] Notice that to enjoy the standing to perform some action does not entail that one is able to perform that action. You may have the standing to drive your car to work, but be unable to do so because the battery is dead.

a babysitter to look after the kids. It could not even participate in ordinary conversation. There might be some purely physical things it could do. But this non-social species of agency ought not be an object of social or political interest. Whatever else we can say about it, any kind of agency that is of interest to us must allow us standings to perform essentially social actions.

However, concerns for standing and for the generic capacity for choice pull apart from one another. Unlike the generic capacity for choice, standing does not contrast with limitation, constraint, interference, or dependence on another's choices. In fact, the precise content of our standings depends on the details of our vulnerabilities to others' choices. Simply put, the content of our standings depends in part on the content of others' standings to interfere in our activities, and on the ways in which others exercise those standings.

We have already seen this point in the context of chess. As I said in the introduction, your power and prerogative to capture your opponent's bishop in a game of chess depends on background rules that confer on your opponent powers and prerogatives to capture your pieces. Without these rules, you would not be vulnerable to defeat – but only because you would not be able to play chess at all. To play chess with others *is* to be vulnerable to interference by one's opponent.

And chess is hardly unique in this respect. Many of the normative contexts about which we care most construct our standings in part by making us subject to other people's choices. For instance, we cannot sell our property to others unless others have property rights themselves – typically including claims against our use of the goods they own. Similarly, in an egalitarian household, spouses are able to participate as equals in joint deliberations about shared resources, in part because of the powers, prerogatives, and claims that both share. Conditions of patriarchy limit even the feminist husband's standing to participate in such joint deliberations. As long as he retains prerogatives to decide unilaterally how to spend household finances, these prerogatives inform the meaning of his words and actions. He can deign to hear his wife's thoughts, but he can at most make her an influential counselor. Final decisions remain his. As a feminist, he should pine for the redistribution of standing.[20]

[20] Marilyn Frye makes a similar point about the ways in which white supremacy limits white people's options: "As a white woman I have certain freedoms and liberties. When I use them, according to my white woman's judgment, to act

The point here is not that we care about things other than agency (like, say, competition or gender equality), and that we are willing to surrender our agency to some extent in order to achieve these other goods. It is that different kinds of relationships constrain our standings in different ways, and so give our actions different content. The patriarchal husband does not necessarily have broader standing than does the egalitarian spouse. Each extension of his standings into new territory carries with it concomitant limitations, losing him access to the standings that we associate with the egalitarian household. So in embracing egalitarian marriage, the feminist husband does not compromise his interest in his own agency out of deference to an interest in his partner's agency. Rather, he judges that a concern for gender equality should inform the determinate structure that his agency will take within a particular social context.

The argument, then, is this. A concern for agency (at least, for beings like us) is, in part, a concern for standing. The structures of our relationships give our standings their determinate content. And many of our vulnerabilities to others' interference, and our subjection to their choices, partially constitute these structures. They are essential to the social context that generates our particular standings. So they are not a threat to our agency, but are essential components of agency's social context. That means that we ought not construe agency as a generic capacity for choice, which contrasts essentially with interference, vulnerability to others' interference, or subjection to others' choices. And in particular, we ought not make agency (so construed) the architectonic concern in our theory of social and political freedom. Hannah Arendt once observed that, since we always locate particular actors in relationships with others, actors are never merely "doers" – they also are sufferers (Arendt 1958, 90). Our point here clarifies her observation. It is not merely contingently true that we always locate actors in relations with others. Rather, first, these relations afford agents resources crucial to the performance of essentially social actions. And second, these relations are constituted in part by complex distributions of vulnerability to interference. Agents, then – or at least, the kinds of agents who are in a position to perform essentially social actions – are necessarily also patients.

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on matters of racism, my enterprise reflects strangely on the matrix of options within which it is undertaken" (Frye 1983, 113). Whiteness–constituted by a bundle of status relations, and conferred on those with particular ancestries or phenotypes–informs the meaning of white people's actions, infecting them with the corrupting taint of white privilege.

2.4 An objection. One way to mitigate the force of the argument is to point out that we can have standings to choose whether we enter into many of the structured relationships we have identified so far. In liberal communities, at least, we can decide whether we will enter any particular game of chess, or whether (and how) we will participate in the institution of marriage. And in these conditions (one might argue), those relationships that we maintain reflect our own choices, and so do not threaten our agency. One might allege that this is what distinguishes chess and egalitarian marriage from (for instance) slavery, which others foist upon us.

The first thing to notice, though, is that when we exercise a standing to enter into or exit from a normatively structured relationship intentionally, that standing derives from background relationships already in effect. This is particularly obvious in the case of marriage. Of course, there are many ways to enter into a marriage, but typically one does so by performing a speech act (or a series of speech acts) – for instance, by saying "I do" in the right ritual context. These speech acts have the relevant illocutionary effects only if those who perform them have the right bundle of status relations with the other members of their communities. In other words, the *institution* of marriage consists in a complex bundle of relationships, which structure and distribute the standing to enter into *particular* marriages. Without the relationships that constitute the institution, we could enjoy no power to enter into (or to exit from) particular marriages. The point generalizes: If we enjoy the standing to choose whether we enter into (or exit from) a particular game of chess, or buy a particular car, that standing emerges from relationships already in place. We never arrive at a bedrock at which we are not already immersed in interpersonal relations.

We can make this point vivid by imagining a life of "absolute freedom," built on a formless foundation from which one might choose all of one's interpersonal relations.[21] This absolute freedom turns out to be no freedom at all. In order to see this, recall first that, as I noted in Section 2.2, our status relations have a communicative dimension. For instance, they allow us to say, "That's mine," and to expect others' comprehension. This requires that others have access to conceptual resources with which to recognize the structures of our relationships, and so to interpret our words and actions

[21] The following argument has obvious roots in Hegel's philosophy. And some deploy similar arguments in favor of the bold thesis that action *as such* is essentially social. However, as I have mentioned in the main text, I aim to argue only that one cannot choose to enter status relations with others unless one already finds oneself in status relations with others. I make no bold claims about the nature of action or of practical reason.

in their light. Typically, social institutions (like the law, the family, or the marketplace) provide the relevant conceptual resources. But if we could live beyond all subjection to others' choices, we would destroy these conceptual resources entirely. Freed from all subjection, we might hope to possess exclusive standing to interpret our own words and actions, to interpret our own interpretations, and so on. But in such conditions, we would become uninterpretable to everyone else. That is because, in order to make sense of our words and actions, others would need to appeal to interpretive standards that we ourselves define. And in order to make sense of these standards, they would need to rely (again) on standards that we define, and so on in an infinite regress. They would have no way to break into our idiolect from the outside. As a result, the meanings of our words and actions would remain permanently hidden from public view. To be sure, our behaviors would still have physical consequences for those around us, as do a hurricane's winds and waters. But they could not constitute actions with any socially recognizable significance. (Some of the most unnerving portraits of tyranny depict people on the edge of falling into this social void, and of assimilating themselves to the forces of nature.) Participation in relationships that we do not ourselves define serves as the bulwark against this total evaporation of standing.

The point is not just that we cannot choose the relationships in which we find ourselves. That is true, and it does limit our control over the content of our own actions (see Krause 2015). But my point is slightly different. It is that, first, we do not enjoy the standing to define our own relationships; and second, our relationships are constituted in part by distributions of vulnerabilities to others' interference. Together, these two claims entail that a being possessed of social standing cannot choose the kinds of interference to which she will be vulnerable. So it does no good to point out that, in liberal societies, we enjoy standings to enter into (or exit from) particular games of chess or particular marriages. Even in liberal societies, we lack the standing to define the structures of *all* of our relationships, and these structures inevitably involve complex distributions of vulnerability to others' interference.

By ignoring the centrality of standing to human agency, and the ways in which our relationships give rise to our social standings, the voluntarist paradigm casts as threats to agency many of the very phenomena on which our agency depends. This is the paradigm's first major distortion. At the risk of being glib, we might say that negative liberty does not pick out a social ideal at all, but an *anti*-social ideal, one that locates our freedom in spaces untouched by other people's choices or capacities for choice. And this is an inapt ideal for social beings like us. If we are to build a conception

of freedom around an underlying concern for human agency, then we ought not cast agency as a generic capacity for choice.

3. Reconceiving Agency, Reframing Freedom: The Relational Approach

I have argued so far that the voluntarist paradigm relies on an inapt conception of agency. But in spite of that, the two insights that motivated the paradigm are just as compelling as they were when we started. First, certain interpersonal phenomena – like slavery – do seem to compromise our agency in certain respects. These interpersonal phenomena alienate us from our own activities, and at an extreme, transform us into mere instruments for the expression of others' wills. And second, these interpersonal threats to agency are morally distinct from the intrapersonal pathologies that also seem to compromise our agency.

I propose that we best respect these insights by construing the social conditions of agency immediately in terms of standing. To be an agent, socially speaking, is not to enjoy a generic capacity for choice, but to bear status relations with the other members of one's community, and so to enjoy standings to perform essentially social actions.[22] Call this a *relational* conception of agency's *interpersonal* aspect.[23] It is worth emphasizing that to enjoy social standing is not yet to enjoy autonomy or self-mastery; it is not yet to enjoy the intrapersonal conditions of self-determination. Nor do I mean to claim that social standing is a mere prerequisite for intrapersonal autonomy, though that might be true (see Section 2.1). Rather, a relational approach to agency's interpersonal aspect targets the conditions in which we count, socially, as agents. On such an approach, we count, socially, as agents if and only if we enjoy standings, emergent from interpersonal (status) relations.

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[22] On this kind of approach, we will need to distinguish two kinds of standings, which we might call "moral" and "immanent." If we have moral rights, and so moral relations with other people, then moral standing comes cheap. We do not need to fight for it, because no one can take it from us, except perhaps by destroying us. (Even that may not do the trick if the dead can retain rights, say, to the punishment of their murderers, or to respect for their final wills.) But to enjoy immanent standing requires the cooperation of the people with whom one lives. One's immanent standings include, say, one's legal standings to own property, to stand for public office, or to rent homes to willing tenants. They include informal standings to play chess, to wait in line, or to walk unimpeded down a public street. The social conditions of agency (as opposed to the intrapersonal conditions) are the social conditions that generate one's *immanent* standings within one's concrete community.

[23] This relational aspect of agency closely resembles the kind of institutional conception of agency that, for instance, John Haugeland finds in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Haugeland 1982, 20).

As we construct a relational approach to freedom, the first thing that we need to notice is that it does not take much to enjoy *some* social standing. People frequently suffer domination or oppression, not because they lack status altogether, but because of the particular statuses they bear. For instance, patriarchal social structures need not deny to women *any* standings. Rather, they structure women's standings in ways that reflect their roles within the patriarchal community, as caregivers, domestic laborers, and sexual providers (Frye 1983, 91). Similarly, some forms of slavery afford the enslaved some (radically attenuated) bundle of legal and informal rights, and so afford them some (very limited) legal standings. I have proposed that, socially, all that it takes to count as an agent is to enjoy social standing. These points open up a gap between the social conditions of agency (so conceived), and the social conditions of freedom.

In order to bridge the gap, we should cast our objections to domination and subjugation, not as manifestations of a concern for agency *simpliciter*, but as reflections of our conceptions of ourselves as particular kinds of persons. Freedom, on this approach, is a matter of having the right kinds of relationships with the members of one's community, reflective of the kind of person one morally is. And the language of freedom affords us resources with which to discuss and critique particular distributions of standing, and the ways in which these distributions construct us as particular kinds of persons. The problem with slavery and patriarchy is not necessarily that these social systems deprive slaves or women of all social standing, but that they distort women's and slaves' agency by locating it in the wrong bundle of standings. In both conditions, slaveholders and patriarchs dominate slaves and women (respectively), because they enjoy the standing to make decisions that *should* belong to the dominated: decisions about where they will live, with whom they will speak, and how others will interact with their bodies.

There are two obvious challenges for this approach. The first is to clarify the relationship between freedom and interference. Perhaps the most pressing objection to the relational approach to freedom is that it seems to sever the connection between freedom and interference altogether. And we ought not do so lightly. The connection seems so intuitive that we might treat it as among the fixed points around which we must accommodate our theories. But we have not severed the connection entirely. We have simply recast it. The relational approach represents particular distributions of interference as typical *effects* of particular distributions of standing. When standing is distributed inappropriately in ways that distort our agency (as in conditions of slavery or patriarchy), the typical result is an objectionable distribution of interference. When slaveholders enjoy extensive prerogatives

to abuse the people they own, they are apt to take advantage of those prerogatives. When patriarchs enjoy broad prerogatives to decide unilaterally the ways in which they will use household resources, they are apt to exercise those prerogatives in ways that limit the opportunities for other members of the household to pursue their personal projects. But these distributions of interference are typical symptoms of an underlying disease, and not the disease itself. The disease is the maldistribution of standing.[24]

The second challenge for this approach is to specify the rights of the free person. As a first pass, we might appeal to some of the familiar rights of classical liberalism: rights against assault, rights to own property, rights to speak one's mind or to practice faiths of one's choosing, and so on. We might look beyond these to the bundles of rights that constitute us as participants in various kinds of family relations, including rights to marry, and rights to acquire guardianship over children. We might look, too, to those rights that involve us in the ongoing construction of the law, including rights to vote and to stand for public office. Of course, we cannot rest content with a laundry list of attractive rights. At some point, we will need standards by which to determine which of these rights together constitute the status of the free person, and which do not. We can find a number of candidate standards in the literature. Perhaps most obviously, we might attempt to appeal to the equal moral dignity of all persons (Waldron and Dan-Cohen 2012). I am inclined to doubt that a concern for formal equality alone will be enough, but I will not evaluate this or any other proposal here. That project deserves its own space.[25] Here, I aim only to show the advantages of characterizing freedom in terms of the distribution of standing, and unfreedom as the maldistribution of standing.

The first advantage, of course, is that we avoid the distortions that plague the voluntarist paradigm's constructive stage. We need cast neither interference in general, nor subjection in general, as a source of unfreedom. Instead, we focus our attention on the kinds of relationships that underlie

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[24] This, I take it, is the lesson we should learn from the case of the lazy slaveholder, characterized in Section 1.1.

[25] In remaining silent on this question, it might seem that I have left the door open for the reintroduction of the voluntarist conception of agency. One might argue, for instance, that the rights of the free person just are those rights which protect her generic capacity for choice. But in order to make this move, we would need to think that distinctively interpersonal threats to this capacity–whether these be interference, or subjection to another's choices–are in general threats to agency in some sense worth caring about. And the argument of Section 2 shows that they are not. Other standards will have to suffice.

particular distributions of interference and subjection, and critique these relations in light of the standards by which we generate the status of the free person. This approach forces us to appraise the institution of marriage by inquiring into the ways in which this institution constructs gender relations, and by asking whether these constructions are consistent with the universal distribution of the rights of the free person – whichever rights those are.

Second, the relational approach illuminates further distortions in the voluntarist paradigm. These distortions arise in the paradigm's second, negative stage, at which we distinguish distinctively interpersonal threats to agency (like interference or domination) from merely intrapersonal or non-personal threats. It is to these distortions that we now turn our attention.

4. The Domain of the Interpersonal

As we saw in Section 1, those working within the voluntarist paradigm construct negative conceptions of freedom that focus specifically on interpersonal threats to a generic capacity for choice. And we saw, first, that this requires standards by which to distinguish the interpersonal from the non-personal (and from the intrapersonal); and second, that the relevant standards typically focus our attention on more or less intentional interventions in our activities. These standards focus our attention on interactions or relations among particular, identifiable agents: on acts of coercion, and on localized hierarchies between particular people (slaveholders and slaves, patriarchs and women within the household). But this focus proves myopic. In this section, I first characterize conditions of structural oppression, focusing on particular kinds of gender oppression. I then argue that a relational approach to freedom reveals important connections between structural oppression and localized relations of domination – connections which the voluntarist paradigm obscures.

4.1 Structural oppression. By "oppression," I mean the social arrangement of people into groups, and the definition and distribution of standing in ways that tend systematically to disadvantage some groups to the advantage of others (Frye 1983). As I have mentioned, the gender concepts typical of patriarchal communities construct men and women as different kinds of persons, possessed of very different bundles of social standings. In some contexts, as in the patriarchal home, these constructions establish relations of domination and subordination between particular men and particular women – between, for instance, husbands and wives, or fathers and daughters. But these household relations manifest within a broader network of status relations that objectionably limit women's standings in a complex variety of ways.

For instance, patriarchy confers on male heads of household standing to represent their homes in the wider community. This does not merely support the domination within the home, but structures the distribution of standing beyond its walls. It imposes significant limitations on women's actions in the workplace, in political fora, and in the marketplace. Consider a woman who approaches a realtor, looking to sell her house. "Happy to help," the realtor says cheerily. "When can I talk with your husband?" By asking this question, the realtor does not interfere in the homeowner's activities (at least, not in any natural sense of interference). He certainly does not prevent her from selling her home. Rather, his question reflects the limitations under which the homeowner labors from the outset of their interaction. The gender concepts available within her community limit her standing as a woman to put her home on the market. In a patriarchal community, that power belongs to men. Even while others may indulge the homeowner's pretensions to patriarchal authority, she will remain a pretender until her community shakes off this gendered distribution of standing.

Or consider the factory manager who suffers constant insubordination from the workers under her authority. The problem may be that the workers are blatantly sexist and rebel against the authority of a woman. Or in some circumstances, it may be something subtler: It may be that gender relations corrupt the standard hierarchy of the workplace. In familiar conditions of gender oppression, women generally do not have the standing to order men around. As a result, workplace relations within a sexist community may construct managers who are men and managers who are women as different kinds of persons, limiting (if not eliminating entirely) women's standings to impose obligations on those who work under their supervision (Kukla 2014, 445–46) . The resulting insubordination does not in itself limit the manager's standing to give orders on the factory floor. Rather, that limitation shows up *ab initio* from the gendered distribution of standing.[26]

The realtor is not responsible for the limitation of the homeowner's standings. Nor are the workers responsible for the limitations under which the manager labors. In fact, in general, we could not trace these limitations to *any* identifiable agent's choices. The homeowner and the realtor, the

[26] These interactions may adversely affect the homeowner's and the manager's self-respect, and so may compromise their intrapersonal autonomy (see section 2.1). But the point I aim to make in this section is that this is not the only reason to find the relationships within which these interactions take place morally objectionable. Even if the homeowner and manager in question have achieved extraordinary intrapersonal autonomy, there is something objectionable about their relationships with others.

manager and the workers all find their gendered relations defined for them. They may have some power to manipulate these relations in light of their own commitments, but this power is not without significant limits: Gender confronts them (and each of us) as a social fact, perhaps susceptible to the corrosive effects of history, but often grimly unresponsive to our own individual wishes. Nor can we attribute these relations to the machinations of a conspiratorial collective. To be sure, there is a sense in which gender oppression (as Frye puts it) "is maintained and promoted by men generally for the benefit of men generally" (Frye 1983, 13). But "men generally" do not constitute an intentional agent, possessed of a capacity for choice; nor do men generally intentionally coordinate their activities in order to uphold their supremacy within a gendered system. Rather, gender oppression is the oblique (and often invisible) upshot of many individual actions.

4.2 Oppression and domination. Since we cannot trace these gender relations to any agent's choices, people working within the voluntarist paradigm are apt to assimilate the limitations that these relations impose on people's options to the broader class of non-personal constraints. On this approach, the homeowner's limited authority to sell her own home has more in common with those limitations attributable to bad luck or bad weather, than with those derivative of coercion or enslavement.

To be sure, those taking this approach need not deny that such limitations are bad, both in themselves, and to the extent that they support relations of domination and subordination (as at Pettit 2012, 63). But even this concession obscures underlying connections between structural oppression and localized domination.

The relational approach makes these connections explicit. In some cases, the gendered distribution of standing generates instances of localized domination; in some cases, it does not. But in all of its forms, the gendered distribution of standing is an essentially interpersonal phenomenon, as is any distribution of standing. After all, distributions of standing emerge from distributions of interpersonal relations. As a result, we have no trouble representing limitations on the homeowner's standing to sell her home, or on the manager's standing to issue orders on the factory floor, as akin in important respects to relations of domination and subordination. And yet in collecting structural oppression and localized domination under a single heading, we do not lose the distinction between the intrapersonal and the non-personal. This is not to say that we should assimilate domination and oppression to a single category. We locate them, as it were, at different levels: Oppression at the level

of the social system, and domination within particular relationships. Attention to their similarities and to their differences should allow us to construct a nuanced taxonomy of the diverse species of unfreedom, allowing us the opportunity to elaborate a sophisticated vocabulary for a complex concern. A relational approach to freedom allows for this nuance, while the voluntarist paradigm discourages it. This is the second advantage of a relational approach to freedom over the voluntarist paradigm.

5. Conclusion

Attention to the ways in which the kinds of relationships current in our communities yield particular distributions of standing affords us access to a nuanced view of our social world. It allows us to represent various species of social unfreedom as distortions of our agency, while (first) distinguishing vulnerability and subjection (in general) from the kinds of vulnerability and subjection that make us unfree, and (second) illuminating morally significant connections between localized domination and structural oppression. In this way, what I have called the relational approach to social freedom captures all that is attractive about the voluntarist paradigm, and illuminates much of what is not.

I propose, then, that we conceive of freedom as a matter of standing: To be an agent (socially speaking) is to enjoy standing *simpliciter*, and to be free is to enjoy some particular bundle of standings, emergent from (for instance) one's rights to free speech, to private ownership, to free movement, and the like. As I noted in Section 3, I have not yet said enough about which rights jointly constitute the status of the free person. And we will need to confront this question if we are to speak concretely about freedom as a social and political ideal. This is where we should focus our work next. For now, I have argued only that if freedom picks out a social and political ideal essentially connected to a concern for agency – one that specifically targets interpersonal threats to agency – then freedom (in this sense) is essentially a matter of standing, defined by the structures of our relationships among the members of a community.

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